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Annual number of page views, in millions, of the FWP website

Donate FAS photos, maybe win a T-shirt

FWP's FishMT web application provides information on Montana's fisheries for anglers, teachers, scientists, and others. This user-friendly app, found on the FWP website, includes stocking rates, fishing pressure, fish distribution, research findings, and more.

To improve the app, FWP needs photographs of fishing access sites and reservoirs to show users what these areas look like.

Please submit photos via Instagram at #FISHMT, making sure each submission includes the name of the water body or access site (such as #FRESNO or #CRAIG). Donors' names will be entered into a drawing for a free "Montana Native Fish" T-shirt.

An FWP intern created a short video to publicize the FishMT app and solicit photographs. Check it out here: http://bit.ly/FWP_FishMT.

More shots of FASs, please



WILDLIFE HABITAT

Get reimbursed for conserving grasslands



The cost-share agreements are good for both cattle and grassland birds

FWP is providing financial help to qualifying landowners interested in transitioning their mediocre cropland or expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands to rangeland. The department also offers 30-year conservation easement leases to landowners who want to conserve native grasslands and shrublands on working ranches.

"These cost-share and conservation lease opportunities help keep grass on the landscape as habitat for prairie songbirds and other wildlife, while at the same time benefiting ranchers and rural communities," says Catherine Wightman, who coordinates the department's Working Grasslands Initiative.

In cost-share agreements, Wightman says, qualifying landowners enter into voluntary 10- to 20-year contracts. FWP pays up to 75 percent of the costs for fencing, stock tanks, water pipelines, seeding, and

other practices necessary to manage the lands as productive rangeland. For their part, landowners agree not to drain wetlands or plant crops or other non-native vegetation.

With conservation leases, landowners receive a one-time payment of \$30 per enrolled acre. In return, they agree not to drain wetlands or plow, burn, or otherwise remove existing native grassland, sagebrush, or other native vegetation for 30 years.

Under both arrangements, landowners also agree to provide public access to hunters and wildlife watchers.

FWP gives top priority to lands managed with rest-rotation grazing and that contain native prairie and shrubland vegetation.

To learn more about eligibility and other initiative details, contact Wightman at (406) 444-3377, cwightman@mt.gov. ■

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Generous donation enhances avian education

Budding birders received a surprise gift this past holiday season. The Jean Smith Estate made a donation to FWP to outfit 25 bird watching trunks across the state.

Each trunk contains 20 quality binoculars, *Sibley Birds West* guidebooks, and lesson plans to help educators organize outings.

Smith, who died in 2015 at age 83, was an ornithology professor at Carroll College in Helena who enjoyed hiking, fishing, hunting, and bird watching. "She just loved birds, and wanted to introduce new people to birding," says Laurie Wolf, FWP's Education Program manager.

FWP invites teachers and youth group leaders to borrow the trunks for bird-education trips. The trunks are available at FWP offices, the department's Montana WILD education center in Helena, and these state parks: Bannack, Travelers' Rest, Fort Owen, Painted Rocks, Chief Plenty Coups, Wayfarer, Makoshika, Lewis & Clark Caverns, Lone Pine, and Missouri Headwaters. ■



Not having to share binoculars makes bird watching more enjoyable, say outdoor educators.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CARTOON BY MIKE MORAN; CRAIG & LUZ LARCOM; JOHN WARNER; THOM BRIDGE; JEFF ERICKSON



1 of 109,000

2018 watercraft inspections break record

Last year, watercraft inspections in Montana hit an all-time high. Crews at more than 40 stations made 109,000 inspections, more than double the number before invasive mussel larvae were detected in 2016. "Watercraft inspection stations are Montana's first line of defense against the introduction of aquatic invasive species," says Thomas Woolf, chief of FWP's Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Bureau.

FWP and partner organizations including the Blackfeet Nation, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Garfield Conservation District, Missoula County Weed District, National Park Service, and Whitefish Lake Institute operate the stations.

Inspectors in Montana intercepted 16 out-of-state boats with invasive mussels attached. These boats came from midwestern and southwestern states, and many were passing through Montana to a final destination elsewhere. The boats were decontaminated, and follow-up inspections were scheduled at their final destinations. "Every western state and province is working on stopping the spread of AIS, and we work closely with them to ensure that boats are clean, drained, and dry when they travel through the region," Woolf says. ■